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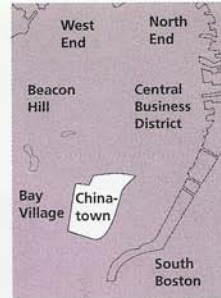
BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION
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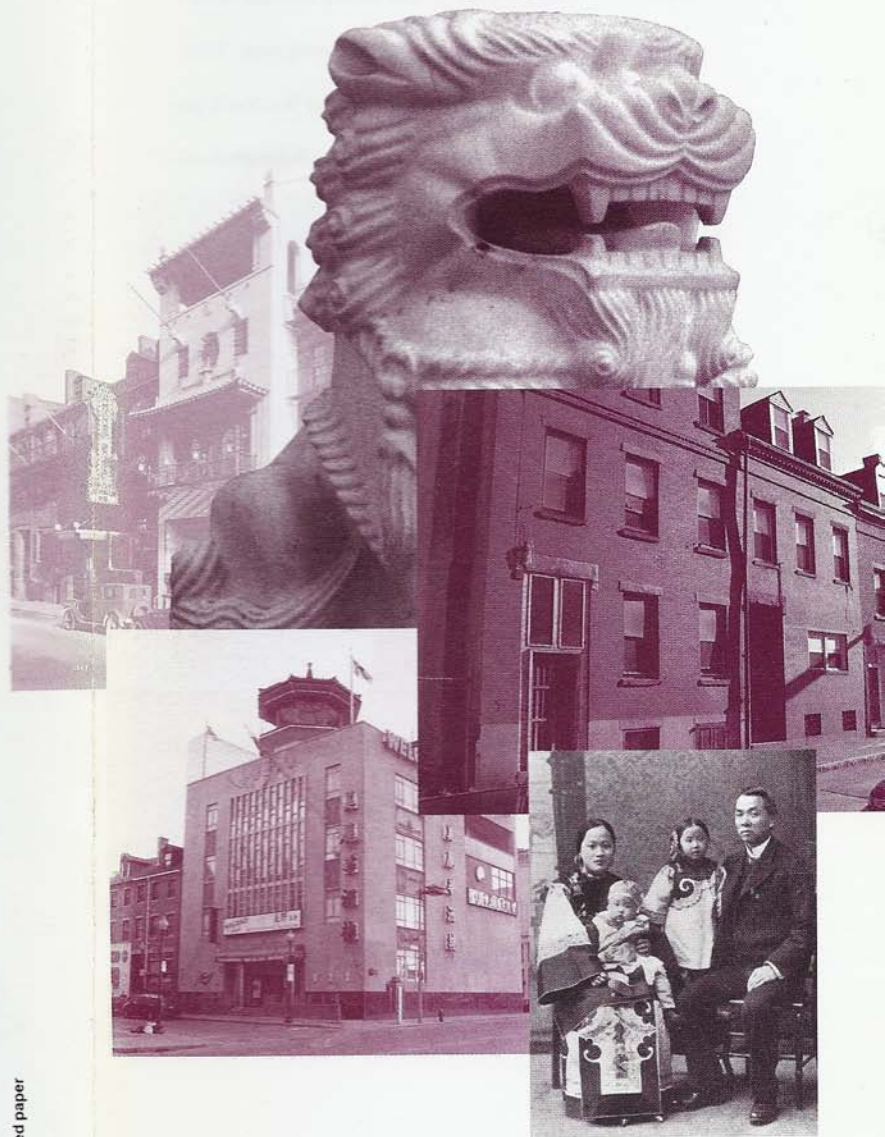


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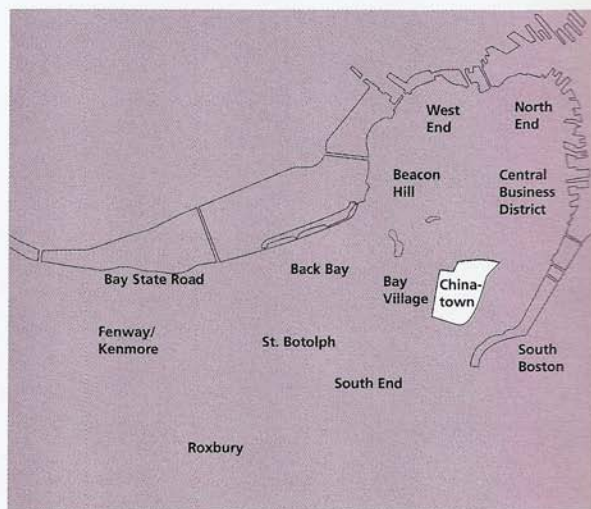
CHINATOWN

Exploring Boston's Neighborhoods



**BOSTON LANDMARKS
COMMISSION**

Boston's culturally distinct Chinatown district evolved from the expansion of the colonial city. The filling in of the South Cove in the 1830s created new streets and commercial wharves. This warehouse sector became Boston's garment district, employing thousands of



European and Middle Eastern immigrants from the 1840s though the 1950s. The last major group to arrive were the Chinese. Today, Chinatown remains a densely populated neighborhood and thriving commercial area.

HANOVER SQUARE

When Boston was settled in 1630, the site of today's Chinatown was marshland along the southern edge of the Shawmut peninsula. It was too remote from the center of the colonial city to attract many settlers. A few houses were built along Essex Street in the 1700s, but settlement remained sparse.

A great elm graced the crossroads at Washington and Essex streets, known as Hanover Square. It became a meeting place for disgruntled colonists in the years preceding the Revolution. In 1763, the Sons of Liberty hung dozens of lanterns from the tree to protest the Stamp Act taxes. Thereafter it was called the "Liberty Tree." The Liberty Tree Building, built in 1850, commemorates the site.

Boston Public Library



FEDERAL FRONT STREET

Like many districts of Boston, much of Chinatown was created by landfill. From 1804 to 1807, Front Street (now Harrison Avenue) was laid out along the tidal flats of the South Cove. In the 1830s, fifty-five more acres of land were filled by the South Cove Corporation, much of it for the Boston and Worcester Railroad's new freight yards.

Residential growth spread from the colonial enclave along Essex Street onto the new waterfront lots. The first homes were Federal mansions and double houses, situated to provide views of the South Bay. The oldest house in the district is the Peter Trott House at 37 Bennet Street. It was part of a row

This woodcut of 1859 depicts the Federal era mansion house of Peter Trott at 37 Bennet Street, as it would have appeared when built in 1807-9.



Arthur Krim

Stylized Art Deco-style designs grace the cast concrete and stone Hudson Building, built in 1928. It is now part of New England Medical Center.

of homes built in 1807-9 by housewright Nathan Cutler. In 1904 it became nurses' housing for the adjacent Boston Dispensary.

GARMENT DISTRICT

The railroad attracted manufacturers to the South Cove. Warehouses and factory lofts for garment makers were concentrated on upper Harrison Avenue. The Gothic Revival building at 15-17 Essex Street, designed by Cummings & Sears in 1875, is a well-preserved example of the early industrial sites. The 1890 red brick and stone Edinboro Building at

85-91 Essex Street is typical of later mercantile structures. Until 1910, it housed the Boston Dry Goods Co, the leading dress and silk house in New England.

Perhaps the most ambitious of the Chinatown commercial buildings is the exquisite Art Deco-style Hudson Building at 75 Kneeland Street. The cast concrete and stone building was designed in 1928 by Kroklyn & Brown. This 14-story loft complex housed over 100 small clothing companies, primarily of Jewish ownership.

NEW IMMIGRANTS AND OLD HOUSES

Beginning in the 1840s, waves of immigrants settled in the South Cove seeking jobs at the wharves, railroads and

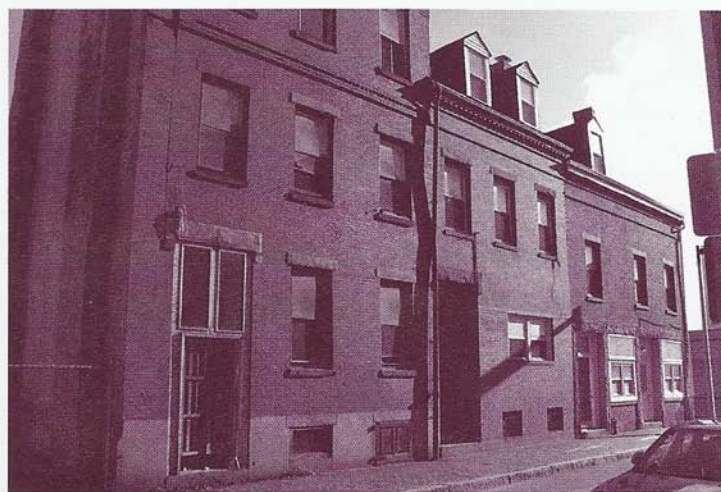
factories. The district became home first to Irish, then Jewish, Syrian, Italian and Asian families. The first worker houses were built from 1835-42 in the alleys behind old Front Street.

Narrow brick row houses feature simple granite stairs and brown-stone lintels typical of the Greek Revival style. These cost-effective details appealed to their carpenter builders. Nos. 4-11 Oxford Place were built in 1842 by housewright Abajiah Johnson. Fine examples of early tenement rows can be found along Knapp and Harvard streets.

A permanent legacy of the South Cove Irish is St. James the Greater Catholic Church. It replaced an earlier church built in 1853 on Harvard Street.

By 1875, the congregation numbered 17,000. The present church on Harrison Avenue was designed in 1873-74 by Patrick C. Keeley. It now serves the Chinese Christian community.

The modest row at 58-64 Harvard Street, built in 1839-42, is typical of the Greek Revival streetscapes that continue to define historic Chinatown.



BOSTON DISPENSARY

In 1859, the Boston Dispensary converted the large Federal-era double house at 37 Bennet Street into an outpatient clinic to serve the largely Irish and Jewish population of the South Cove. The innovative clinic was first established on Beacon Hill in 1796. When it moved to the South Cove in 1856, the Dispensary continued to develop community health services, including the nation's first evening clinic.

In 1930, the Dispensary merged with Tufts Dental School and the Boston Floating Hospital (a clinic founded to provide healthful sea breezes to urban children) to form the New England Medical Center. A new NEMC hospital was built the next year at Nassau Street. In 1938, the Pratt Diagnostic Hospital joined the group. The Boston Dispensary Building continues to serve as the administrative core of the hospital complex.

EARLY CHINATOWN

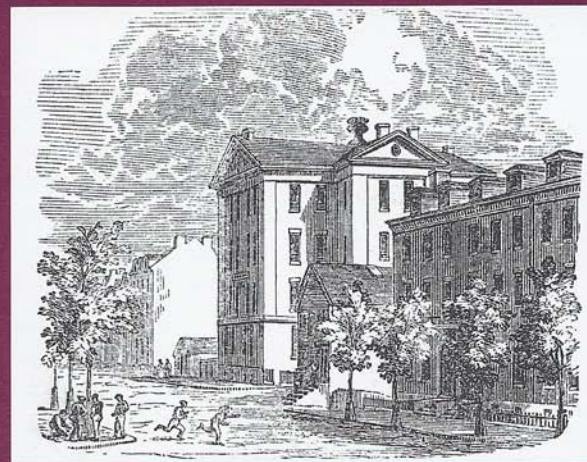
The first Chinese to settle in New England were brought from San Francisco in 1870 to break a labor strike at the

Sampson Shoe Factory in the town of North Adams. Jobless by 1874, some of these workers drifted to Boston. According to tradition, Chinese settlers pitched tents along Oliver Place, now called Ping On Alley (the "street of peace and security"). By 1875, the first Chinese laundries appeared on Harrison Avenue.

In the 1880s, more Chinese were recruited from the West Coast to work on major construction projects. By 1890, the area from Kneeland to Essex streets was established as the Chinese "colony" of Boston. Harrison Avenue was lined with the traditional businesses of laundry service and restaurants. By 1890, the first Chinese restaurant in Boston, Hong Far Low, was operating at 36 ½ Harrison Street. Its loggia balcony with celestial decoration, added in 1905, is the oldest example of Chinese-style commercial architecture in Boston.

By 1910, prosperous Chinese businessmen like Moy Tong were remodeling whole blocks of old Greek Revival row houses. In the 1930s, when

QUINCY SCHOOL



When the Josiah Quincy School opened at 90 Tyler Street in 1847, it was the most progressive school in America. Conceived as a model school by reformer Horace Mann (1796-1859), the Quincy School featured a host of innovations. Each teacher had his or her own classroom, and students were separated by age, making it the first graded middle school in the nation. The reforms were so successful that the Quincy model was introduced throughout Boston's schools.

The simple red brick structure was designed in 1847 by Boston architect Gridley J. F. Bryant, best

known for his commercial buildings. Much of the four-story Greek Revival school was destroyed by fire in 1858. The remarkably intact interior dates from the rebuilding, and includes Italianate-style wooden stairways and slate blackboards. The Quincy School is now three stories tall, having lost its fourth to the fabled Hurricane of 1938.

In 1976, after 129 years, the Quincy School closed as a public school. That same year, the old Quincy School became home to the Quong Kow (Chinese) School.

Chinese restaurants were entering their first era of prosperity, more buildings were redesigned with Asian motifs. The restaurant at 8 Tyler Street was remodeled in 1933 by Chew Park in the Art Deco style, featuring Chinese motifs in pink and green glazed brick.

FAMILY ASSOCIATIONS

Chinatown's population grew slowly due to laws which barred most Chinese from entering the United States after 1883. Chinatown was overwhelmingly male until after WWII. Chinese family associations served as "uncles" or substitute parents for the "bachelor" immigrants separated from their families. They helped "sojourners" keep ties with China and promoted

Chinese values among the children of immigrants.

The Goon Shee-Lee Association Building at 10 Tyler Street was the first building to be built in the Chinese Revival style in Chinatown. The stucco facade is adorned with Chinese and Spanish features reminiscent of the Philippines. Built for the Goon Shee family in 1928, the site was home to restaurants and community groups. The Lee Association moved here from Beach Street in 1970.

CHINESE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Chinese entrepreneurs organized to support Asian business ownership in their neighborhood. In



Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Boston

Foo dog brackets attend the pagoda-style celestial balcony of the Goon Shee-Lee Association Building, shown here shortly after it was built in 1928.

Park designed the limestone building in the progressive International Style, overlaid with bronze Chinese Revival decorations. The design represented both the dynamic modern business community and traditional ethnic values. The aluminum screen, evocative of bamboo trellising, was added in 1956 after half of the building was lost to highway construction. Crowned with a roof-top wooden pagoda, it remains one of the most recognized landmarks of Boston.

POST-WAR RESTAURANT EXPLOSION

The immediate post-war years saw unprecedented restaurant growth in

1914, the On Leong Goon Shan Weh (Chinese Merchants Association) was founded on Harrison Street. Strong supporters of traditional Chinese values, this group established the Quong Kow Chinese School in 1919 to teach Chinese to the children of immigrants. The merchants also sponsored cultural activities, including traditional Chinese opera.

In 1949-51, the Chinese Merchants Association built an impressive new headquarters at 20 Hudson Street. Architect Edward Chin-

According to local lore, Hong Far Low, the first Chinese restaurant in Boston, opened in 1879. Its tiled entrance was remodeled in 1916.



Arthur Krim

Chinatown. The Good Earth Restaurant, built in 1940 at 7 Tyler Street, was the first building in Chinatown to be specifically designed as a restaurant. The China Pearl, established in 1961, has the distinction of having the oldest neon sign in Chinatown. The best preserved post-war restaurant facades include the mythological figures of Bob Lee's Islander on Tyler Street. To this day, restaurants remain major employers in Chinatown.

CHINATOWN TODAY

In the 1960s, the Central Artery and the Massachusetts Turnpike seriously encroached on Chinatown. In recent

years, Chinese wholesalers have spread across the artery, helping to revitalize the old garment district. Chinatown remains New England's major wholesale center for traditional ceramics, restaurant wares and poultry. The district's family-run fortune cookie and noodle factories supply Asian restaurants across the region.

Still predominantly Chinese, the community has absorbed many other Asian groups since the 1970s, especially Vietnamese and Cambodians, who

are themselves building new ethnic businesses and traditions. Today, the rich legacy of the community is being preserved by the Chinese Historical Society of New England, located in the historic Boylston Building, built in 1887 and now a designated Boston Landmark. The Boylston Building was renovated as the China Trade Center in 1996 by the Chinese Economic Development Council.

Boston Public Library



The Merchants Association Building combines modern architecture with Chinese symbols. It serves as a visual gateway into Chinatown.

The Exploring Boston's Neighborhoods Series is published by the Boston Landmarks Commission.

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